



## Creating a Native American Women's Wellness Program to Promote Cancer Screening and Education

### Public Health Problem

Cancer is the second leading cause of death for American Indian/Alaska Natives, even though cancer incidence is often lower for this group. Five-year survival rates are significantly lower for racial and ethnic minority populations, in part because of the late stage-at-diagnosis and problems with access to follow-up care. For American Indian/Alaska Native populations in Washington, the age-adjusted breast cancer mortality rate is 28.6 per 100,000, considerably higher than the national rate of 15.0 per 100,000.

### Evidence That Prevention Works

Older women and those from culturally or geographically isolated communities or racial and ethnic minority groups (including Native American/Alaska Native women) are priority populations for the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. Within these populations, public health providers should involve the community and open the lines of communication to build an environment of trust.

### Program Example

With support from Avon and the Susan G. Komen Foundation, the South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency's Native Women's Wellness Program hired outreach workers in 2000 in the five tribal communities in Washington State. The program has five American Indian outreach workers and five tribal health care providers (one for each tribe) to encourage women to use available health services. Because they are highly respected and well known in their communities, the American Indian outreach workers have built a level of trust with the women in their communities. This rapport has enabled outreach workers to better educate and encourage the women to take advantage of the health services that are offered to them. They also have increased turnout rates by providing incentives, holding special events such as mother and daughter teas, and offering transportation and day care to make it easier for the women to be screened. In 2000, only 136 women were newly enrolled. In 2001, after hiring American Indian outreach workers, the number of newly enrolled women almost doubled to 251. In 2001, the program delivered the highest number of services in its history: 1,218 Pap tests, mammograms, and clinical breast exams combined. Since its inception, the South Puget Intertribal Agency's Native Women's Wellness Program has provided 1,600 mammograms, 2,330 clinical breast exams, and 2,473 Pap tests.

### Implications

Without this program, late diagnoses of breast and cervical cancer would have continued in this population that faces higher than average cancer death rates. This outreach program demonstrates the importance of identifying the right community leaders who can help influence the behaviors within a special population.